



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: 24/7 CARBON-FREE ENERGY

Local communities are at the forefront of the impacts of climate change, but they are also leading on solutions to this challenge. The 24/7 carbon-free energy approach is the latest and most ambitious decarbonization commitment that local government can leverage to act on climate.

So what is 24/7 carbon-free energy and what do Iowans need to know?

What does 24/7 Carbon-free energy mean?

In essence, 24/7 carbon-free energy requires that at any given moment, the electricity being utilized is coming from 100% emission-free sources. Today when you turn on your lights or power up an appliance, that power is supplied from a mix of clean energy as well as power from coal plants. A 24/7 vision seeks to close this gap and eliminate emission-producing power sources from the equation.

How is this different from other clean energy pledges?

A city or business may pledge to reach 100% clean energy while still being served coal power. You may have heard MidAmerican Energy say it is on course to generate renewable power equal to 100% of its Iowa customers' use. Unfortunately, that goal is mostly accounting, generating more renewables in some hours to cover the generation from the five coal plants they continue to operate within the state. That means Iowa customers are not really getting the 100% renewable energy promised. A 24/7 clean energy pledge means clean energy — 24 hours a day, seven days a week — with no coal pollution impacting Iowa communities.

Electricity generated from coal is also more expensive than energy generated from renewables. Iowans are left paying higher rates so that the utility can reap greater profits, all while being exposed to the toxic waste and air pollution created by coal. This deal is bad for Iowans and makes the solution obvious — we must accelerate the shift to clean energy.

FAQ: 24/7 CARBON-FREE ENERGY

Is there a precedent for communities setting this goal?

In early 2021, the City of Des Moines adopted a communitywide 24/7 carbon-free electricity resolution to transition the city's electricity away from fossil fuels by 2035. This resolution is thought to be the first of its kind nationwide. Since then, two other cities in Iowa followed suit in 2022: Waterloo and Windsor Heights — the latter of which did so with an ambitious target of 2030. Other communities nationwide have also made similar goals, including South Lake Tahoe, CA, and Ithaca, NY.

How do we achieve 24/7 carbon-free energy?

Iowa has incredible wind and solar potential. Wind accounted for 57% of Iowa's net electricity generation in 2021 — the highest percentage of electricity by wind of any state — and large-scale solar projects are becoming more prevalent. Iowa must continue this clean energy leadership and accelerate our renewable resources. As we meet our electricity needs with clean energy, we can leave behind polluting and expensive fossil fuels. The transition will require expanded energy efficiency measures so we can power more with less. Developing transmission and distribution infrastructure is also needed to integrate more renewables into the grid, especially as electricity demand is projected to increase. Finally, pairing renewable energy resources with storage solutions will allow for excess electricity to be stored for when it's needed.

Why do we need this specific commitment?

Businesses, states, and local governments across the country are setting 100% clean energy goals, but not every 100% clean energy resolution is created equal. Many “net-zero” clean energy goals allow for the use of carbon offsets to meet targets, meaning that an entity can pay someone else to remove a given quantity of greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere instead of doing it themselves. This approach will not phase out fossil fuel usage enough to prevent the worst impacts of climate change from taking place. Local governments have the opportunity to drive meaningful change by declaring formal 24/7 carbon-free energy commitments and implementing strategies with collaborative partners to achieve that goal.

Why are local actions important?

The consequences of inaction are severe. Local government can and must step up to the plate and enact measures to transition away from fossil fuels in lieu of timely action from Washington. Local clean energy solutions can cut emissions, create high-paying jobs, reduce energy bills, and build more resilient communities. Collectively, these commitments can create a ripple effect through the state, creating more demand for a just and equitable energy system. The time to act is now, and local leadership can move the needle forward.